

OAK PARK MALL 6  
HEAVY METAL

102023 TIC 8  
12:00 SAT

2347 01/14/89  
\$5.00 AD

*Shane had it figured. Even though the writing on the panel was in an alien script and the controls were not meant for human hands - Shane felt confident enough to take the risk.*

*What choice did he have? Liz couldn't make another circuit. Even now he felt her body wilting against his. He risked a quick glance and saw the skin on her face had blanched to a fish-belly white, her eyes half closed, and her mouth a thin, gaped line. Without him there for support, she'd have collapsed to the bottom of the shuttle a long time ago.*

*No choice. No choice at all. He had to try.*

*By Shane's estimation, they were once again passing through the Earth's mantle, fast approaching the outer crust. Even protected behind the mysterious, whisper thin shield of the shuttle, transversing the Earth's core was brutal. Yes, they were protected from the atomic heat and, somehow, the shield also dimmed the otherwise crippling light from the molten plasma, but the tracks in that area were sadistically wild: corkscrew after corkscrew, uncountable dive loops, hammerhead turns to give you whiplash; even traveling at what had to be a significant fraction of the speed of light, this part of the ride seemed to last an eternity.*

*Shane recognized their position - they were about to transverse the launch mechanism that would propel them from inside the earth out into the atmosphere.*

*He wrapped an arm around Liz. This was by far the most difficult part of all.*

*They passed over the drive tire and Shane felt the speed increase in his stomach. Next thing; they were out of the crust, zipping over the planet's surface on a more-or-less straight length of track.*

*Below, earth. Or what had become of it: all the cities destroyed, oceans of fire, no trees or fields or green of any kind. A dead planet. Look closely and see the bodies of people and animals clustered together in areas of disaster.*

*Liz buried her face in Shane's chest. She couldn't take another circuit.*

*They passed over a pneumatic launch mechanism that would shoot them up a top hat track that ascended well beyond the limits of earth's atmosphere. Shane steadied his hands over the control panel and focused on the track ahead. They weren't the only passengers on this ride - he'd seen other shuttles and had watched them perform the same maneuver he was about to attempt.*

*Of course, those other shuttles had been inhabited by aliens - whooping and hollering; waving their claw-like hands with excitement as they enjoyed the thrill. Their faces even more monstrous for the gleeful smiles across their toothy mouths.*

*Shane set his jaw. The apex was nearby. With precision timing, he hit a panel with his right elbow and used his left hand to yank a lever down.*

*\*pop\**

*The shuttle broke free from the tracks. Carried by momentum, the craft floated away into space, tumbling and twirling.*

*No longer being propelled at impossible speeds along an insane alien roller coaster gave Shane an overwhelming feeling of relief. He grabbed Liz tight and kissed her passionately. Too stunned to react at first, Liz was slow to respond, but when she did - with an open mouth and her hand coming to rest on the back of his head - Shane knew everything would be alright.*

*After a while, he let her go and returned focus to the control panel.*

*Oh yeah. He could figure this out. A few taps, a few tugs, and the shuttle righted itself. He found the controls for propulsion and steering, gave them a quick test, then settled back in his seat.*

*He smiled at Liz. She snuggled up close. Through the translucent shield they saw an infinity of stars waiting for them.*

*Shane pushed a button, and they went looking for Virgil, and then to find a new home.*

EARLIER THAT DAY

"Your dad's off drunk somewhere," Virgil said.

"Yeah," Shane agreed. "Probably."

"So, what?" Virgil asked, getting annoyed. "Walk home?"

Home being a 45-minute car ride - God knows how long a walk - from where they stood: the pick-up area in the parking lot of an amusement park called Worlds of Fun. It was almost midnight. The park had been closed for over an hour. All the other kids they'd been waiting with were long gone by now.

"Give him a few more minutes," Shane said. "He'll show." Shane's dad was a notorious drunk, true, but he was a genial alcoholic. Soon he'd place his watery eyes on a clock and remember something about doing something for somebody.... *Oh! Pick up Shane and his friend from the park! Right!* Then, after one more for the road, he'd show up. He always did eventually.

Virgil grunted and walked over to the Coke can he'd been kicking around all night. He kicked it some more.

The mercury vapor lights of the parking lot started flickering off section by section.

"Perfect," Virgil said when the lights over their heads went dark. He kicked the can one last time, hard, launching it into the black void of asphalt.

"He'll show," Shane said again. "Don't worry."

"Yeah, right," Virgil grumbled. He sat down on a wheel stop.

Shane gave him space. Virgil could be a real prick when he got upset and Shane didn't want to have this day ruined because, up until his dad failed to show, it had been an excellent excursion. Well planned and expertly executed. Indeed, it had been early June when they'd first decided to visit the park, but Shane realized this was too important an event to rush into. You didn't want to go when the park was overcrowded, so weekends and holidays

were out. Also, you needed to get there right when the gates open to avoid the hour-long lines for the big rides, so early morning transportation must be arranged. Finally, money. You had to save enough to last a full day; that's lunch and dinner with drinks in between. Mid-August, then, it was determined, would be perfect. On a Tuesday or Wednesday. About a week before school starts. The park shouldn't be too full then as summer vacations would be winding down, they'd have time to beg and bargain for a ride, and they'd have a couple months' worth of allowance and other monies saved for the occasion.

Until finally the planning paid off. They arrived at the park very early, before the crowds, and got to ride the main coasters - The Orient Express and Screamer - with minimal wait-time. Twice. Then, having gotten those out of the way, they were able to relax and enjoy some of the park's more gentle diversions. Bird-dogging the summertime girls wearing shorts and tank tops; sometimes even bikinis on those who'd wandered over from Oceans of Fun. Sky Heig and The Barnstormer were perfect for getting a bird's eye view at some of the finest cleavage in Kansas City.

By mid-afternoon they'd hit a slump and decided to recharge at the Incred-O-Dome. Virgil fell asleep beneath the towering screen. Then they strolled down Cyclone Sadie's Saloon, wasted time and money at the arcade, before realizing that they had better ride the River City Rampage soon to give the sun a chance to dry out their clothes.

Bad news - the River City wait was almost an hour. Good news! They got in line next to two cute girls who liked to flirt. Or at least one was flitting. With Virgil. But that was to be expected as Virgil was undeniably tall, blond and handsome. Shane, on the other hand, was on the short side, a tad chubby, with the swarthy of Eastern Europe somewhere in his blood; nevertheless, the other girl - less cute than her friend, but still decent - engaged Shane in respectable conversation while their friends bandied about clumsy innuendos.

Shane learned a lot about the girl during their time waiting in line together. Her name was Liz. She enjoyed Biology and had plans to become a doctor. Her family lived in Shawnee Mission (rich!). She wore glasses with thick, red frames and had a single, strong ponytail of auburn hair down her back. Her shirt had a collar and a little lizard over the pocket and her shorts were beige with lots of pockets. Her cheeks dimpled when she smiled and that was absolutely adorable.

Eventually, all four of them got on a boat together, sitting boy/girl/boy/girl. It was mostly a lame ride - lots of floating and bumping into well placed logs - until the end when the rubber-lined float shot through a series of rapids then plummeted down a waterfall with a tremendous splash.

And everybody got screaming wet.

That's when Shane learned the most important thing about Liz: Yes, she wore a bra. No, it didn't make much difference under her cooling, wet shirt.

They stayed together as a group for a few more rides and Shane had been encouraged by how close Liz sat next to him. She even grabbed hold of him once during the ultra-lame Octopus ride, laughing as the centrifugal force of the spinning cab almost put her on his lap.

Eh. Maybe the Octopus wasn't so lame after all.

Eventually, however, the girls had to go meet up with their families for diner. Before separating, Liz had borrowed a pen from one of the vendors and scribbled her phone number on a napkin for Shane.

He took that same paper from his pocket now and, in the dark of the night, ran his thumbs over the surface, enjoying the texture, imagining he could decipher the ink by touch. Though he'd already committed the numbers to memory, Shane wanted to check them again, and study the handwriting, so he held the napkin up to see it by the light of the half-moon.

*Wait.... What is that?*

There. Standing at the apex of the tracks of the Orient Express roller coaster - Shane saw the figure of a man silhouetted against the moon. Except.... not a man. It was inhumanly tall and had more arms than you would normally see on anybody who was not the Indian god of transformation.

It was too dark and too far away for Shane to make out details, but it looked as if the creature was sabotaging the coaster. Its many arms played over the rails and Shane could hear the faint screech of metal being bent.

*What the hell...?*

"Virg," Shane said, talking no louder than a whisper. "Virgil. Come here. Quick."

"Whaaa-aaaat!" Virgil exploded off the wheel stop, still pissed. "What do you want? Why are you whispering?"

"Shhhhhush!" Shane grabbed his friend and pointed toward the Orient Express. "Look up there."

"I don't see... Whoa. What the hell?"

Suddenly, as if it felt the weight of extra eyes watching, the creature stopped what it was doing and stood up straight, facing the boys.

They continued to stare at the thing. Backlit by the moon, they couldn't make out any features, but whatever it was was easily ten feet tall. And, not including the two long, thin legs, they made out at least four other appendages that looked like arms.

"Holy shit," Virgil whispered.

The creature moved. There was a whirlwind of motion. When it became still again, it held something with two of its hands. Something that looked like a gun. Pointed right at the boys.

Virgil shuffled a half step then, in a flash, he was gone. Nothing left but the impression of a lightning-bolt behind Shane's eyes and the smell of ozone.

"Virgil!" Shane cried. He looked towards the top of the roller coaster, saw a line of smiling teeth in the inky black shadow of a face where the creature's mouth would be, then felt a blast of heat.

And the parking lot was empty save for two thin wisps of smoke floating in the air.

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"...Shane... Oh man, Shane.... Come on, man."

Shane Muncie heard Virgil's voice, felt a hand pushing his shoulder and slowly blinked his eyes open.

"Goddamn.... Man.... I thought you were dead."

Virgil's face filled Shane's waking vision. As life came into focus, Shane saw and felt that he was flat on his back, Virgil kneeling beside him, and behind Virgil's was the starlit sky contained in a noisy, crowded room.

Wait.... The sky? In a room? And noisy, yes, lots of voices; but none of it made sense. It was all gibberish. Maybe he was suffering a concussion or something

"Shane. We need your help," Virgil continued. "Come on, man, get up."

But no. Not a concussion because he understood Virgil's words well enough. Holy shit, what if it was one of those weird brain traumas where he could only hear and understand one person for the rest of his life. And that one person was Virgil fucking Templeton! Holy shit!

Shane sat up and looked around. He was in a room, kindof, but it floated in space, and the boundaries were not walls, floor and ceiling; but a sort of a bubble made from translucent film. Beyond the film? Only space and stars.

And the gibberish? Well, that was easy. Shane didn't recognize it as words because it came from a dizzying variety of alien life forms. Multitudes of beasts covered with hair; monsters covered by scales: some partly robotic; a few all metallic - grunting, beeping and whirring to each other as they stood in their respective groups, just killing time.

It was like the waiting room for all the rejects from the Star Wars Cantina scene.

"Oh, thank God," Shane sank back down, lying on his back.

"Shane!" Virgil tugged him up by his collar. "This isn't a dream. We're in serious trouble here."

"Yeah, no, I know," Shane said. "But it's better than brain trauma. A weird brain trauma."

Virgil raised his hand to slap Shane's face; paused to think about it, then, yes, slapped his friend a few times - front hand, back hand, repeat.

"What the hell!" Shane grabbed Virgil's wrist.

"You're delirious." Virgil replied.

"Like fuck I am." Shane came to his feet. "Besides, physical violence isn't the cure-all for mental distress."

"Yeah, you and Scooby Doo can debate that later. Right now, we need your big brain to think up a way out of this mess."

"We?" Shane asked. Virgil stepped aside and presented the girl from River City. Liz stood there, wide-eyed and terrified.

"Hi," she said with a timid wave.

"Oh hey!" Shane replied. "Didn't see you there. ... How are you?"

"Scared," she said, hugging herself. "Yeah. Really, really scared."

Shane went to her and wrapped an arm around her shoulder. "It's okay," he said. "It'll be okay."

"From your lips," Virgil said. "But you'd better come up with something more than words toot sweet."

Shane reconsidered the environment and situation. Yes, they were in some alien holding pen surrounded by inhuman nightmares, but none of the monsters seemed overly threatening, they could still breathe and talk, and the knuckles of his hand were resting on Liz's breast and she didn't seem to mind. Things could be worse.

"What happened?" Shane asked Virgil.

"You tell me. We were in the parking-lot, looking at that thing on the roller coaster, now we're here."

Shane turned to the girl. "Liz?"

"About the same," she answered. "One of the park's golf-carts accidentally bumped me. I said I was okay, but they insisted on checking me out, so they took me to their offices. I was waiting there so long; I grew impatient and walked off. I got lost and wandered into a room where these... these... things were working on some sort of model. They looked at me and.... I woke up here. With you guys."

"Hmmm," Shane rubbed his chin and scanned the room again. Within their groups, the aliens seemed quite happy, chatting with one another and goofing off. While he watched, a multicolored burst of light fell upon a clan of crab-like monsters which instantly burst into raucous cheers, waving their claws in the air. A path cleared for them, and they scuttled to a series of shuttles, exactly like a roller coaster train, entering the cars two by two. A whistle blew, a chain clacked, and the train shot out of the bubble on a metal track heading into the void of space.

"Well?" Virgil demanded. "You read a lot of science fiction bullshit. What's going on?"

"I.... I'm not sure," Shane hedged.

Just then they heard a woman's voice, loud and clear, ringing over the din of alien sounds. It said, "Oh. My. GOSH!"

They turned towards the sound. Five stunningly beautiful and totally naked woman were walking right towards them. The women were perfect - breasts, hair, face, hips and neatly trimmed triangles of pubes all in place. Only.... Their skin was various shades of red; from light pink to brickhouse, and their hair - all their hair - was jet black.

"LOOK at that!" The one in the lead said, pointing a long and dramatic finger at Virgil. "TELL me he isn't the spitting image of Reggie!"

In a flash, the five women had Virgil surrounded. They ran their hands over his body, surreptitiously taking off his shirt and jeans as they explored, tousling his hair and giggling all the while.

Then five pairs of hands working as one grabbed the elastic band of Virgil's underwear and tugged. Before they could pull the FOTLs all the way down, he swatted their hands away and snatched his tighty-whities back to where they more or less covered his pride.

"Ho!" Virgil cried. "Ho-ooOoo-I'd on a second! Ladies, please!"

The women retreated, shocked by Virgil's response. The one who'd spoken earlier, the one whose body was the color of fire, cocked her hip, flipped her luscious mane of blue-black hair and said, "Well. I NEVER! Come on, girls."

They turned to leave.

"Wait!" Shane reached out to stop one of the female aliens. She twists just enough so that Shane's hand found itself cupping a perfect globe of boob.

"Oh my," the alien giggled, pressing herself firmly into Shane's hand. "Maybe this one is more like Reggie."

"Gack!" Shane tried to retreat, but the alien faced him down. When he tried to ward her off, she took his other hand and clamped it to her remaining exposed breast. Shane felt the nipples harden and saw her chest and collar flush with a splotchy, deep-purple rash. Her sisters joined around, talking all at once.

"He certainly has the moves."

"But he's so short!"

"And ugly."

"Almost cute ugly."

"Almost, not quite."

"Look! He's blushing!"

"That helps."

"Oh my!" This from the one who had closed in on Shane. "Yesssss," she flashed her wide, emerald eyes at Shane, then she gently ran a finger down his cheek and stepped away, breaking contact. "Yes, indeed."

By now, Virgil had his pants and shirt on was steady enough to attempt a rescue. "Excuse me!" he interrupted, breaking through the circle of flesh to join his friend. "But we would like an explanation or something. Right, Shane? We've got questions, don't we? Shane?"

"Eeep," Shane squeaked, and then tried to correct his voice by clearing his throat. "eee-Yes. Yes. Questions. We have."

"Wait a sec.," the alien who first approached them said. "Look at these two.... They're not Boons. They're not even from Hosst!"

"Oh my!" One of them finally noticed Liz standing off to the side. "What about this?"

They surrounded Liz and starting an inspection - lifting her arms, turning her around. One of them undid her ponytail and fluffed out her hair. All the while talking amongst themselves.

"Too, too short."

"Rather formless."

"I don't even know what to say about the color."

"Pitiful."

"The face?"

"Ug."

"This hair... is so... so...."

"Maybe it's warm?"

"Hmmm."

Liz made a noise and her eyes started to water.

Shane pulled one of the aliens away, rather roughly, and blocked the rest of them from Liz. "Hey!" he shouted. "Back off!"

"Oh!" the fire-skinned one exclaimed, startled by the outburst. "Oh dear, no. No, these are not Hosst at all. Too ugly. Too.... rude."

"Yeah. Well," Shane puffed out his chest and raised his chin. "At least we're modest."

The alien women exchanged curious glances. One of them shrugged, her breasts bouncing recklessly. Modest?

"Okay, wait, we've got off on the wrong foot here," Virgil said. "Look, we are not Hosst. Or Boon. We don't know what any of that is. In fact, we don't know what any of *this* is," he swept his arm around to include the entire assemblage of creatures.

"Whatever," the fire-skinned alien replied. "We don't have to put up with this *rudeness*. Come on, girls."

Before they could leave, Shane blurted out, "We're earthlings!"

The aliens considered this for a moment, and then started laughing. "Oh, how silly of us! This is the Earth ride, and you're earthlings! Isn't that adorable?"

"Oh, do get a picture!" one of them said, rushing to pose with Shane, Virgil and Liz.

Another of the aliens stepped back a few paces and produced a camera. "Wait," Shane asked. "Where did you get that?" Then a flashbulb popped, and he had to rub his eyes.

Then they all wanted pictures; individually, and as a group. Some wanted funny poses. Shane drew the line at recreating his tit-holding scene, but Virgil allowed himself to be persuaded.

This went on for a long while, and Shane tried to ask questions during the process, but never received any response clearer from the alien women than, "Oh my gosh!"

Then a light from above flashed on the group. The aliens squealed with delight. "Our turn!" they exclaimed. "Finally."

A path cleared through the alien throng and the naked women started walking, waving "bye!"

"Wait!" Virgil kept pace. "Where are you going?"

"It's our turn, silly. Hey! Come with!"

"Oh my, yes. You must. You'll be our own Earthling tour guide."

"You can't say no."

"That's right! Your job is to make us happy."

"And since you look like Reggie, we're already happy!"

This last comment induced howls of laughter.

Once again, they surrounded Virgil, and he had no choice but to continue walking with them as they made their way through the crowd and wound up at a shuttle connected to a set of rails that looked just like the starting point of a roller coaster.

By now, of course, they had once again stripped Virgil down to his underwear and were playing their hands over his skin as they helped him into the shuttle.

"I hope this ride is worth it," the fire-skinned one said, wrapping her arms around Virgil as the shuttle's translucent shield started to close. "A 45-minute wait for a ride that'll only last two and a half light years. Sheesh."

A dizzy Virgil scanned the crowd; saw Shane and Liz standing at the edge of the platform.

"Shane!" he called, holding out a hand.

"Virgil!" Shane replied, reaching for his friend.

An alarm sounded. A gangly alien with multiple arms walked the platform, making sure it was clear. The alien gently, but firmly, pushed Shane back behind a yellow line.

There was a clacking sound and the shuttle started to move. Shane looked down the track and saw that it stretched out into space, running towards a familiar looking globe - one that used to have an atmosphere and blue water before it had been moved from its orbit onto a massive set of rails.

It was now a dead ball spouting fire from its core, collecting kinetic energy, posed at the top of the rails, waiting to begin its ride.

The last thing Shane saw in the shuttle before it shot out into space was a pair of blindingly white Fruit-of-the-Looms smacking against the rear of the translucent shield.

End

*Back in the days of cassette tapes, you couldn't just hit "next" to skip a song. You had to fast forward, which ate time. Precious time that would otherwise be spent rocking out while driving around aimlessly. Therefore, the Heavy Metal Soundtrack cassette had one terrible flaw: the second track, side B, Open Arms by Journey. Don't get me wrong, I love me some Journey, but that's not the right song for an otherwise rocking compilation (true, Blue Lamp was similarly lame, however, as that was the last song on the cassette, it was easier to just hit eject and move on than bother with fast forward).*

*My friend and I had a solution; it wasn't perfect, but it got us through. Whenever Open Arms came on, we goofed the lyrics. Goofed them most pornographically, singing as loud as possible to drown out the erstwhile Steve Perry. Obviously, we referred to the song as Open Legs and by the end we wouldn't even bother with rhyme or structure, we'd just spew enough filth to make Andrew Dice Clay run for church.*

*I confess, I still do that when I hear Open Arms. But only in my head. My poor, sick head.*